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I will begin by asking a ~~very~~ simple, though by no means simplistic, question: **why bother?** I take my cue from André Musskopf's response to Björn Krondorfer, in which he raises the serious issue of "...the anxieties of gay scholars regarding a critical engagement with heterosexual men." (T&S, 14.1, 92) I will linger on these anxieties, for I think they have not been sufficiently talked about in the current debate. André goes further and observes how "...conversations with heterosexual men sometimes may seem quite boring and naïve." (T&S, 14.1, 92) As a gay man and scholar of religion, I know whereof he speaks. Straight men simply have not been where gay men are, and, despite much good will on all sides, continue to be. I am suspicious of heterosexual power, even within the academy, because it stems from entitlement. Yes, I am male and heir to that entitlement, but mine is always a risky, second-order sort of privilege. So why should I willingly jeopardize my scholarly work by mainstreaming it, by opening it to the gaze of the powerful Other? My question is a serious one, and only partly rhetorical. Of course I want to engage with my straight male academic colleagues, but at what price to my soul?

Perhaps I could start, in a time-honoured tradition, by recounting a story. This is one of those things that Björn says can make some straight scholars of men's studies a bit queasy: this public reflection on one's sexual experience. Yet this is also what makes gay theology what it is as a critical, engaged, and ~~yes~~, erotic process of reflection on our lives.

My story may or may not be true, it may be a sheer figment of my imagination, or it may, in fact, be the hard, cold truth. I won't tell you, because it's not really important. I would much rather keep you guessing—tease you, as it were. What I am concerned with here is the powerful work of the erotic imagination—the erotic tale—and how it often “opens up,” in surprisingly liberating ways, the hard process of critical theological and religious reflection. If you are familiar with my work, particularly on male Catholic saints, you will recognize the strategy.

Once upon a time, there was a pious boy on the verge of adolescence studying in a minor seminary in the hopes of becoming a priest. Every day, our young boy—we shall call him Luke—was surrounded by the desirable bodies of other boys in various stages of undress, whether in the dormitory, the shower or the locker room. These bodies excited Luke so much that he kept looking for erections out of the corner of his eye. But he had to be careful. A single lingering look could give him away, betray him as that horrible thing he knew he was becoming: a queer. Some of these bodies were much younger than Luke's and not yet hairy, while others, more mature and chiselled, seemed heavenly to his wandering eyes. He even caught himself in chapel a few times, looking for bulges in the pants of his classmates. Luke felt slightly sacrilegious when that happened, but it also excited him. He wondered if Jesus had noticed.

There was one body, that of an upper class man, that particularly fascinated Luke. This older boy was beautiful, and so manly. His father was a Green Beret fighting in Vietnam, and the son would be following suit as soon as he graduated from high school (the boy did die there a few years later). This older boy befriended Luke, and they would spend time doing the everyday, ordinary things that friends do together. One day Luke—

it was really stronger than him, and it seemed so natural—touched the older boy's thigh. Immediately, Luke was pushed back and called one of those names that he was so afraid of hearing because he knew it was true. The older boy never again spoke to Luke, though he never hurt him.

Luke became an even more pious boy. He started spending time alone in chapel, away from the other boys and their silly games. He prayed to all sorts of saints because they were big and strong—heroes like his friend—but they couldn't hurt him. Luke liked that. He felt safe. After many years of being the perfect seminarian, Luke left. He also left the Catholic Church. The Church for him was like his friend: ready, at the slightest innocent provocation, to call him names. Luke didn't trust the Church. It was full of sexy men waiting to betray and hurt him. But just so you know, Luke did live happily ever after. He became an Anglican priest.

In many ways, parts of my erotic tale are rather predictable: young queer boy is the best little boy in the world: studious, pious and well-mannered; young queer boy falls for hunky straight boy, only to be rejected at the slightest show of affection; young queer boy draws upon his inner strength to survive; young queer boy makes good. I'm sure a number of you in this room recognize parts of yourself in Luke. But perhaps an equally significant number of you do not. **And therein lays the crucial difference, the rub, as they say.** Young queer boys—or older gay men, for that matter—are always in jeopardy. Young straight boys or older straight men are not. Straight men have never had to define themselves—who and what they are—against the world in a radically fundamental way. The world belongs to them as a matter of course; they simply have to reshape and reclaim it. Queer boys, whatever their age, try to squeeze and rearrange themselves in it: some

quite successfully; others, less so. As Björn and others have pointed out, the “power differential” between ourselves and heterosexual men is real. At times, thankfully, the squeezing turns into good old fashioned rebellion, and that is indeed a good and sacred thing. One way of doing this is simply to stand on the straight stage and yell out who we are and what we have to say. André Muszkopf puts it this way: “If masculinity is a land of straight guys it is always risky for gay men to walk on, although it might be exciting for some, sometimes.” (T&S, 14.1, 92) You bet it is. Otherwise, why bother? Why stand here today? The thrill—and we have to recognize that this is a legitimate part of our scholarship—comes from the sheer fun of striking (in a friendly way, of course) at the oftentimes pompous edifice of masculinity. Precisely because “masculine” is so often what we have been told we are not. What do we therefore do? For one, we can claim to be even more one of the guys than you are. Or we can wear mascara to freak you out.

Lest you think, however, that I am overindulging in a ~~weird~~ form of “minoritizing rhetoric” (which can indeed be quite comfy), let me reassure you that I am not. I think gay culture and gay scholarship can and should serve a subversive purpose, though they may, at times, appear incredibly mainstream (~~which is, in itself, a wholly different topic for another panel and another paper~~). I think Björn in his text does not give enough credit to this destabilizing or critical edge to our scholarship. He does a fine and necessary job highlighting the anxieties we often provoke in our straight colleagues, but he seems to suggest that, if only there were more dialogue between us, then these anxieties in our poor straight brothers would not be so acute, and the academy would be better off for it. And we gay religious scholars or theologians would not be so ignored and isolated. I’m not sure this isn’t another form of privileged heterosexual analysis and discourse, in the

sense that it sees our mainstreaming as a desirable and necessary thing. I know Björn is careful not to suggest that (he talks, for example, about integration into broader academic fields as a danger for minority forms of scholarship), but I can't help but feeling that this is exactly what the price of dialogue might be.

I would like to repeat briefly what must appear obvious to the vast majority of us: that gay religious scholarship is an essential and necessary process of re-appropriation, of rewriting ourselves back into the stories from which we have been erased or downright excluded. If we don't do it ourselves—or if we feel we must await the sanction of those who marginalized us in the first place, the purveyors of patriarchy—then our stories will no longer be our stories. Rather, as has been the case all too often, they will be told and retold on heterosexual terms, our difference only serving to shore up majority privilege. I do not believe this to be either desirable or inevitable, despite what we are told—and so often naively tell ourselves—about our increased social and cultural acceptance.

In “Who's Afraid of Gay Theology?” Björn Krondorfer outlines five clusters or themes around which heterosexual male anxiety seems to congeal when it comes to gay religious scholarship, a sort of litany of straight male angst: indifference (the “I don't need to care” response); boundary violations (the “You're not really a scholar” response); the gay-ing of religion (the “That's so dirty” response); autobiographical insertions (the “I feel like a voyeur” response); and finally, what is perhaps the most acute of them all, erotic confessions (the “You're not gonna do that to my backside” response). I would like to focus on the last two, as these are *present* in my own work, a perception that Björn himself shares and that he highlights in his text. Of course, I do violate boundaries on a regular basis in my writings, but let's just say that that is an essential *and existential* strategic need.

First, a word (or rather a few) about male-male penetration. Here, I really should defer to my friend and colleague, Ron Long, who has done (puns intended) far more penetrating and deep work on this topic. Ron's writings on the penetrated male bottom as a new masculine ideal—and how contemporary homophile movements are instrumental in this process of reframing—warrants, I have long believed, more serious and sustained attention. With Ron, I might cry out: “All power to the bottom!” It's true: been there, done that. You may think it a tad “sappy” in its Christian overtones, but vulnerability is power. For a male, the experience of getting “royally ~~fucked~~ ^{screwed}” (there, I've said it)—that self-shattering, self-effacing experience is the prelude to a re-inscription, a re-framing, a re-appropriation of normative masculinity. It is a masculinity open to the other in a very real way—actually, in every way, with every orifice, with every pore. It's not about the abusive power of the top—that boring icon of the dominant, macho, hegemonic male—but rather about the active vulnerable power of the receptive male, he who is supremely confident of who he is. (I ask the question, though perhaps it is a risky one: can a male who has not been penetrated really understand women?)

In his text, Björn writes: “Indeed, the image of male-male penetration goes to the core of heterosexual stability, a threat so deep, I think, that it can hardly be spoken, visualized, imagined or engaged with – even within the safe distancing that academic discourse can provide.” (T&S, 13.3, 268) No doubt, that is true. Björn also talks about Ron Long's claim as something “difficult to imagine.” (269) What's the problem? Like my Aunt Sadie, I feel like telling you to get over it. That may be a tad insensitive or even naïve, but sometimes a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. And if a man's gotta let another man penetrate him, then so be it. For many of us, a real man is precisely that.

Of course, I have just been doing exactly what Björn says freaks my heterosexual colleagues out: I have been suggesting that sexual receptivity can be a site of enlightened masculinity, an almost privileged way of attaining some higher consciousness. That may well sound somewhat mushy, and, believe me, I'm not that simplistically romantic. I'm taking my cue from Björn here. The image of the feminized, penetrated male still haunts the patriarchy. Let me therefore suggest another paradigm, one that I have applied with some success to the response to my own work—that of pollution (with all due respect to, and great affection for, Mary Douglas). I am convinced that when gay religious scholars engage in the sort of writing Björn describes, we are, in fact, perceived as being matter seriously “out of place,” as agents of seepage, as uncontained fluids. Symbolically, that can't be allowed to happen. I think Björn's five scholarly types of heterosexual angst are really part of a continuum. When I or others engage in what Björn quite aptly calls “gay confessional scholarship,” it's really as though we were making the academy unholy, a site of dirt and defilement. When we insert queer autobiographical details in our work, or seek to make religion “gayer,” it's as though we were staining the sparkling purity of the sacred. I suggest that the rigid boundaries of the scholarly enterprise and the integrity of the straight male anal orifice symbolically mirror each other. Screw one, and you fuck the other. My intent is not to be crude, but I could think of no other way of capturing the essential yet dramatic sense of what I was trying to say.

I turn now to Björn's fourth cluster—autobiographical insertions—because it is here, I believe, that gay and straight religious scholars can perhaps most readily meet. In his article, Björn makes an interesting and quite incisive observation. He speaks of a sort of familiarity of readings: “But more to the point, such [autobiographical] insertions are

experienced conceptually and emotionally as 'othering', since the experiences described are not their own. We have to imagine the reading experience of heterosexual men as ambivalent since it can de-stabilize their identity. On the one hand, gay theology opens a window into a male world different from the straight man's own sexuality – an uncanny experience, since it is othering and yet familiar. On the other hand, the reading of gay autobiographical passages may feel like eavesdropping on an intimate conversation, and one may wonder whether one should continue to listen." (T&S, 13.3, 267) I say: by all means, do linger and listen. In a way, we are talking to you. Björn is right to underscore the uncanny familiarity of gay male religious scholarship to straight male ears, and how unsettling and confusing that might be. Though we may be "other" than you, we do, after all, share a common space of desire; we are male. I can understand the risk involved—the voyeuristic tinge that may lead others to believe that you too are "like that," or which may raise unsettling questions in your own mind. But I do think that the ambivalence of the eavesdropping is what keeps you, the straight man, honest. Because, in fact, the other always reflects us back to ourselves.

By way of conclusion, let me thank Björn for the very important debate that he has launched, perhaps without really thinking about its implications. For too long, we straight and gay scholars of religion have been busy working, reflecting, writing and publishing at cross purposes. But don't get me wrong: I believe that the coming together is a far riskier proposition for us gay scholars than it might be for you straight ones. You do remain the dominant tops, in more ways than one. Perhaps like the ever fabulous Liz Taylor in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?" we should get really drunk together, fight it out in the bitchiest way, and then simply move on. But who gets to wear the pants?